

THE CLERGY OF A MEDIEVAL SCOTTISH PARISH

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A RECENT writer has declared that "the parish clergy are, after all, in every age, the primary material of Church History"¹; and it might be urged in support of this dictum that the measure of effectiveness attending the Church's fulfilment of its mission is revealed by the way in which the cure of souls, its essential function, is performed. But in considering this aspect of the medieval Church in Scotland, we must not read into the phrase, "cure of souls," modern and Reformed conceptions of the work of the Christian ministry. In the Middle Ages, when used with reference to a parish, it meant, generally speaking, the administration of the sacraments to the parishioners²; and among these sacraments is to be included not only the Eucharist and baptism, but also confirmation, marriage, unction and penance. If, then, we ask the question: How efficiently or inefficiently was it done? we must be content with an answer based on partial and inadequate data for the material, especially in the earlier part of the period, is not abundant. Moreover, a survey of medieval charters suggests at first sight that when the normal arrangements for the service of a parochial cure, viz., the appointment of a rector, was altered by the appropriation of the church to a monastery, cathedral or collegiate church, provision was made, as a matter of course, for the *cura animarum* by the appointment of a priest of different status and reduced emolument, a vicar or parochial chaplain. But when we attempt to make a list of the clergy of a medieval parish and to annotate it, we discover that no such general assumption is possible and that the situation in regard to the cure of souls is often inexplicable or anomalous.

I

I propose to take for purposes of illustration a typical enough country parish with which I am very familiar—Carrington, in Midlothian; and

¹ Smyth, *Simeon and Church Order*, p. 9.

² Cf. the phrase used of the parochial cure of Dunbar: "Ad officium archipresbyteri pertineat curam gerere parochie . . . prout alias rector consueverat invenire sacramenta ecclesiastica parochianis dicte ecclesie" (*Misc. Scottish History Socy.*, VI, p. 92).

something must first be said about local circumstances. Carrington is situated on the southward-rising slope of the broad valley between the Moorfoots and the Pentlands ; and the church, in the Middle Ages, stood in the north-east corner of the parish, distant by several miles from many points in it.¹ How it came into being we can only conjecture. Cosmo Innes's statement that the parish in its origin was "the manor tithed to the church," apart from its oversimplification of an involved historical process, cannot be applied to every parish. Some, like Carrington, had no "manor" and arose probably by subdivision. It is possible that the church of Carrington may have been originally a chapel within the parish of Cockpen (where there was a "manor") until it obtained parochial rights.² Be that as it may, Carrington was a parish in the reign of David I (1124-1153). In the thirteenth century, the benefice is valued at £19-6-8, a sum we may compare with the valuations set on other parishes of the same region : Lochorver (Borthwick) is valued at £40-6-8 ; Cockpen at £26 ; Musselburgh at £9-6-8 ; Heriot at £13-7-9.³ In another and probably later roll, the figures and relative valuations are somewhat different : Carrington, 18 merks ; Lochorwart, 40 merks ; Cockpen, 20 merks ; Musselburgh, 70 merks ; Heriot, 30 merks⁴ ; while, in 1451, Carrington is valued as "not exceeding £12"⁵ and, in 1461, it is mentioned as "not exceeding 25 merks."⁶ The church of which nothing is left but of which the site is easily identified—for the churchyard remains—must have been a small edifice. Probably, like the country church of Dunbar's ambition, it was thatched with heather⁷—it was certainly so after the Reformation.⁸ There is no reference to a manse in medieval records.

¹ The situation of parish churches was often disadvantageous. Cf. John Major's complaint in 1521 that there were often thirty hamlets attached to one parish church which was distant from some of them four, five or even ten miles. (Quoted, Pinkerton, *History*, II, p. 393.)

² There are many instances of chapels becoming parish churches, e.g., Foulis, originally a chapel in the parish of Rossincherach (*RPSA*, *passim*). Parishes continued to be erected in this way till the 16th century, e.g., Bertramshotts in 1476 (*HMC. Rep.*, XI, App. Pt. VI, p. 48). Cf. also *Archbops. of St. Ands.*, IV, pp. 244-245.

³ *Priory of Coldingham*, p. cxix.

⁴ *RPSA.*, p. 30.

⁵ *CPR.*, X, p. 175.

⁶ *Ibid.*, XI, p. 426.

⁷ "Greit abbais grayth I nill to gather
Bot ane kirk scant coverit with hadder."

(*Of the Warldis Instabilite.*)

⁸ *Kirk Session Records*, 19th Oct., 1669.

The earliest mention of the church of Carrington occurs in a charter of Malcolm IV, granted in 1163 or 1164, which indicates that David I gave to the monastery of Scone, among other donations,

“the church of Louchforuer with the teinds and dues belonging to it and the church of Kerintun with all dues belonging to it.”¹

On 5th December, 1164, it appears again in a bull of Pope Alexander III which confirms, among other possessions of Scone “by the gift of King David,” the church of Keringthon with everything belonging to it.² King William the Lion and Richard and Hugh, successive Bishops of St. Andrews, repeat this confirmation before 1185.³ In all these charters, Carrington is conjoined with Lochorwart; but, on 29th December, 1225, it is the single subject of a bull of Pope Honorius III,⁴ from which it transpires that Cardinal James (who had been legate in Scotland in 1220⁵) had granted the desire of the abbey of Scone to devote the church of Carrington (i.e., its revenues) to the repair of their church and buildings; and the Pope, on the petition of the monastery, now ratifies the transaction. Honorius once more confirmed the church of Carrington to its importunate possessors on 17th December, 1226.⁶

These details reveal the handicap with which such a church had to contend practically from the outset of its career. Its revenues were diverted to a distant monastery and the repair of the church and buildings of Scone was doubtless a pretext for annexing the whole teinds, rectorial and vicarage, and for making provision for the cure of souls at the cheapest rate. Carrington, according to the charter of Richard, Bishop of St. Andrews, is one of the churches which the canons of Scone are permitted to serve by chaplains who may be retained or removed at will;⁷ and thus the status of the first parish priest whose name is recorded is that of parochial chaplain. Nicholas, chaplain of Kerington, appears along with Gregory, chaplain of Lasswade, in a Newbattle charter, c. 1236.⁸ The customary provision for chaplains is shown by the thirteenth century statute which enacts that—

“no chaplain . . . shall demand or receive for his services during a year a stipulated sum above a hundred shillings. . . . Nevertheless, if any rector or vicar is disposed . . . to make any gift of old clothes or other things to his chaplain, we make no prohibition on this head.”⁹

We know nothing of Nicholas's career; but one event of note may have

¹ *Scon*, 5.

² *Ibid.*, 18.

³ *Ibid.*, 23, 48, 50.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁵ Theiner, *Vet. Mon.*, p. 16.

⁶ *Scon*, 103.

⁷ *Scon*, 48.

⁸ *Newbotle*, 35.

⁹ *Statutes*, pp. 53-54.

happened while he was at Carrington—the dedication of the church by David de Bernham, Bishop of St. Andrews, on 2nd May, 1243.¹

More than a century² elapses before further evidence is forthcoming ; and then ensued a transaction of some consequence for the church of Carrington. On 12 February, 1356/7, William, Bishop of St. Andrews, ordered the abbey of Scone to be invested in the church of Blare (i.e., Blairgowrie) on the death or demission of its rector ;³ and, on the same day, granted the canons of Scone this church with the proviso that, on their obtaining possession of it, the church of Kerington should revert to the disposal of the bishop.⁴ Yet another charter granted by Bishop William on the same date reveals that the proposal for this exchange emanated from the canons on the grounds that while Carrington is abundant enough in revenues, the dangers of the roads and its distance from the monastery tell against its usefulness to Scone ; Blair, somewhat less lucrative, is near the monastery and situated in lands of which it has the temporal lordship.⁵ Nothing more is heard of the project until, on 15 February, 1373/4, Pope Gregory XI issued a bull, “On the exchange of the church of Kerintun with the church of Blare,” in which is repeated the substance of the bishop’s charters, and from which it appears that Robert II had joined his plea to that of the canons to secure papal consent.⁶ The contention that Blair had smaller endowments than Carrington is not borne out by the roll of benefices given in the registers of St. Andrews and Dunfermline,⁷ where the former is valued at 23 merks and the latter at 18. In any case, Carrington, about this time, passed out of the hands of the abbey of Scone and the benefice became once more an independent rectory.

II

The likelihood is that the exchange of Carrington for Blair was an accomplished fact considerably earlier than the date of the bull which was obtained for its ratification ; and that the exploitation of the parish by regular clergy was scarcely at an end when it fell a prey to exploitation by seculars. At all events, the church of Carrington came to be held by pluralists, the first of whom was probably rector by papal nomination to the vacancy created by Scone’s demission of the benefice. On 2nd July, 1365, the petition of Andrew de Trebrun, M.A., of the diocese of Moray—

¹ Lockhart, *Church of Scotland in Thirteenth Century*, p. 53. The name of the patron saint is unknown.

² Except for one uncertain reference, *RMS.*, I, p. 594.

³ *Scon*, 174.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 185.

PSA., p. 31 ; *Dunfermelyn*, 313.

" for the church of Kynhwl (Kinnoul) . . . value £20 . . . notwithstanding he has the church of Kerynton . . . which he is ready to resign "—

was granted by the Pope.¹ This is the sole evidence of Trebrun's connection with Carrington, but it is characteristic and sufficient; for it can safely be said of this typical churchman of the fourteenth century who appears to have opened his ecclesiastical career in Scotland by holding this benefice that, however wide were his travels, Carrington was one of the places he never saw.

Trebrun, who was a graduate of Paris, where he "determined" in February, 1364/5,² belonged to a family which included more than one ecclesiastical careerist.³ He appears as a suppliant to the Pope for various benefices between 1365 and 1394, nor were his petitions only on his own behalf. On 13th April, 1379, Andrew de Trebrun, M.A., licentiate in Civil Law by examination and envoy of Robert, king of Scots,⁴ successfully petitioned Pope Clement VII on behalf of his brother, William de Trebrun, bachelor of Theology, for a vacant canonry and prebend of Aberdeen, notwithstanding he already held a canonry of Glasgow.⁵ The Roll of the Master of Arts of the English Nation at Paris in 1378 contains the names of three Trebruns—Andrew, petitioning for a canonry of Dunkeld notwithstanding he has the archdeaconry of St. Andrews; William, for a canonry of Glasgow; and John, for a canonry of Aberdeen.⁶

There was no university in Scotland till the foundation of St. Andrews in 1411. Hence Scottish students found their way to continental universities and more especially, with the adherence of Scotland to the Popes of Avignon, to the universities of France. In 1365 Andrew de Trebrun was already M.A., which implies that he had reached the age of twenty.⁷ Again in 1378 and 1379⁸ he is mentioned as one of the Masters of Arts

¹ CPR., Petitions, I, p. 506; the index erroneously identifies Kerynton with Carriden.

² *Auct. Chart. Univ. Paris*, I, p. 640.

³ Besides his brothers William and John, mentioned *supra*, David de Trebrun, clerk of Moray, appears in 1398 (*Lib. S. Crucis*, p. 119). Alan de Trebrune of that ilk, lord of Trebroune (near Lauder) is mentioned three times between 1350 and 1380 (*Dryburgh*, 284, pp. 271, 274); while Henry de Trebrun was collector for the king's Exchequer in the Sherifdom of Inverness, Forres and Elgin in 1359 (*Exch. Rolls*, II, p. 5). See *Copiale*, p. 429.

⁴ See *ibid.*, p. xxxvii.

⁵ CPR., Petitions, I, p. 544.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 546 (granted 17th Nov.).

⁷ Cf. Powicke, *Stephen Langton*, p. 28.

⁸ CPR., I, p. 546; *Auct. Chart. Univ. Paris*, III, p. 269.

of the English Nation and was in residence at Paris in 1383, according to a comment made by the editor of the Chartulary of the University of Paris *à propos* of William de Trebrun, M.A., bachelor of Theology, who was *nuntius* of the second roll of the university on behalf of the English Nation in 1383—

“It is nothing remarkable . . . that the *nuntius* of the English Nation should be a Scot. For in that Nation only the Scots and a very few (others) . . . were Clementists.”¹

Meanwhile, his interests in the Scottish Church were being assiduously canvassed by the erstwhile parson of Carrington. His possession of the rectory of Kinnoul, granted him in 1365 by Pope Urban V, did not go unchallenged and, on 28th September of the following year, while petitioning successfully for a canonry of Moray, he is mentioned as engaged in litigation at Rome about the Perthshire parish.² The Pope directed him to resign his suit, but he evidently did not abate his claim for, in 1378, he was engaged in controversy with the abbey of Cambuskenneth over this benefice,³ and the year 1394 saw him still in possession of it.⁴ It is only in 1405 that John Borthwick obtains provision of Kinnoul on the prospective resignation of Andrew de Trebrun, “who holds it unlawfully.”⁵ After this year,⁶ we hear no more of Andrew. Besides Carrington and Kinnoul, he had been presented to the rectory of Errol (1394)⁷ and held canonries of Moray (1366),⁸ Dunkeld (1378)⁹ and Brechin (1394)¹⁰ as well as the archdeaconry of St. Andrews (after 1378).¹¹ As we have seen, he was Robert II’s envoy at Avignon in 1379, and he appears as *elemosinar* to the king in 1403.¹² Trebrun is a typical enough ecclesiastic of his time. His connection with a foreign university, his mercenary attitude towards his profession, his constant petitions and litigations, his frequent presence at Avignon, and his use of royal favour to further his interests are matched by many similar instances. To him Carrington was little more than a name. He had some interest in the revenues of the parish ; none in the cure of souls.

¹ *Auct. Chart Univ. Paris*, III, pp. 240, 241. Cf. p. 314. “Nation” is, of course, used here in the academic sense. The Nations at Paris were the French, the Normans, the Picards and the English. “Clementistae” were supporters of the Avignon Pope, Clement VII.

² *CPR.*, Petitions, I, p. 535. ³ *CPR.*, IV, p. 237 ; *Cambuskenneth*, 165, 167.

⁴ *CPR.*, Petitions, I, p. 620. ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 633.

⁶ The latest mention of him is actually on 25th April, 1405, when he appears at St. Andrews as procurator of the nuns of Elcho (*Copiale*, p. 79).

⁷ *CPR.*, Petitions, I, p. 620. ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 535.

⁹ *Auct. Chart. Univ. Paris*, III, p. 269.

¹⁰ *CPR.*, Petitions, I, p. 620. ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 546.

¹² *Copiale*, p. 429 from *HMC. Rep.*, V, p. 622.

After nearly half a century we discover a successor to Trebrun in David Ramsay, who held the rectory of Carrington in 1446,¹ and is mentioned again in 1449.² We are fairly safe in assuming that he belonged to the family of Ramsay of Dalhousie—he is said, in a phrase which is “common form,” to have been “by both parents of a noble and great race of barons,”³ and may have been a son of Sir Alexander Ramsay of Dalhousie and a brother of Robert Ramsay, who, after his death and acting as his heir, received forty pounds Scots upon the high altar of the church of Cockpen from Sir David Hay of Lochorwart,⁴ and is possibly to be identified with Robert Ramsay of Swynishede, Sir Alexander’s second son.⁵ On 26th February, 1450/1, the Pope granted that Ramsay, who is described as chaplain to the Bishop of St. Andrews and a member of his household, might hold with Carrington, which is worth £12, another benefice.⁶ He was collated, on 26th May, 1454, to the provostry of the Collegiate Church of Bothans in East Lothian,⁷ and appears as provost in a charter of 29th July of the same year;⁸ but he had died before 7th August, 1455, when, as above-mentioned, Robert Ramsay appears as his heir.

III

Ramsay may have owed his appointment to the fact that his father, as laird of Dalhousie and Carrington, had resumed the patronage of the church of Carrington. His successor, Patrick Hume (or Home), who was likewise connected with a powerful baronial house,⁹ probably obtained the rectory—he appears as rector of Carrington in a record of 6th August, 1461¹⁰—by papal provision for he was already archdeacon of Teviotdale. Hume was a pluralist of the most aggressive type, a valiant litigant over the benefices he held or coveted. Like Trebrun, he was associated with at

¹ *RMS.*, II, 1607.

² *HMC. Rep.*, V, p. 29. There were other contemporaries of the same name, e.g., David Ramsay, canon and (later) prior of St. Andrews. See *Copiale*, pp. 475-476.

³ *CPR.*, X, p. 175. He does not appear in *Scots Peerage*.

⁴ *Yester Writs*, 116. In 1490, Robert Ramsay (younger (?)) claimed to be heir of the deceased Sir David Ramsay, parson of Kerington, his father’s brother (*ADC.*, II, p. 419).

⁵ *Scots Peerage*, III, p. 91.

⁶ *CPR.*, X, p. 175. One suspects in this item confusion with his St. Andrews namesake.

⁷ *Yester Writs*, 110.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁹ “Of a noble and baronial race” (*CPR.*, XI, p. 425). He also does not appear in *Scots Peerage*.

¹⁰ *CPR.*, XI, pp. 425-6.

least one of his kinsmen in the pursuit of their interests ; but, unlike any of his predecessors or successors (so far as records show), he had the dubious distinction of being excommunicated.

In all likelihood, he is to be identified with " Patricius Hume," who was a determinant (a candidate for the degree of B.A.) at St. Andrews in 1433 and a licentiate (proceeding to the degree of M.A.) in 1437.¹ On 28th June, 1447, his payment of annates for the archdeaconry of Teviotdale is recorded.² For fourteen years thereafter his career cannot be traced, but this hiatus is compensated by the wealth of documentary evidence concerning the protracted controversy over his claim to the priory of Coldingham. This foundation of King Edgar, who granted it to the Benedictine monks of Durham, had encountered many changes of fortune through its ambiguous position as an outpost of English monasticism on Scottish soil. " On grounds of ingratitude and high treason," it was bestowed upon Dunfermline Abbey by King Robert Bruce ;³ but, in the fifteenth century, its " numerous efforts for independence against the pretensions of the monastery of Dunfermline " ⁴ were still going on, and the monks of Durham had never, it seems, completely withdrawn. Now, in 1461, the old accusation of disloyalty was revived against them by Patrick Hume—

" John Pincher, a man of Durham and prior of Coldingham . . . has contrived and done his best to perform divers things to the hurt of James, king of Scots . . . and has reduced the number of monks to two and delapidated their goods."⁵

The Pope, accordingly, allowed that, if these charges were true, the priory should be separated from Durham and given *in commendam* to Patrick Hume, the petitioner,

" who is a member of the household of the said king, to be held by him for life together with the archdeaconry (of Teviotdale) . . . and with the parish church of Carrington."⁶

Hume had a quittance for part of the annates of Coldingham on 26th August of the same year.⁷ But, on 1st December, the prior of the mother-house of Durham took the first step towards the vindication of the rights

¹ *St. A. U. Recs.*, pp. 14, 19.

² *Scottish Benefices*, p. 135.

³ *Bk. of Pluscarden*, VIII, cap. xxii.

⁴ *Priory of Coldingham*, p. viii.

⁵ The latter part of this charge—to say nothing of the first—was manifestly baseless. Cf. *Priory of Coldingham*, pp. 194-5.

⁶ *CPR.*, XI, pp. 425-6. Carrington appears as " Heringtom."

⁷ *Scottish Benefices*, p. 239.

of the prior and priory of Coldingham by invoking the aid and protection of that monastery's bailie, Sir Alexander Hume, a kinsman of their oppressor,¹ and of the Bishop of Glasgow;² and this was followed by a reasoned refutation, submitted to the delegates appointed by the Pope, of the charges made by Hume against the prior of Coldingham.³ For the vicissitudes of the long and acrimonious controversy which ensued and which involved Hume's brother, John, canon of Dunbar, I must refer you to the Surtees Society's volume, *The Priory of Coldingham*. In August, 1467, both the Humes were denounced as excommunicate at Durham, Norham and Newcastle.⁴ This may have been a sign that the monks believed they had strengthened their position and gained support at Rome. But a record of 28th May, 1472, shows that the Crown had now intervened in the conflict and the priory was to be united to the Chapel Royal of St. Mary (? St. Andrews) on the demission of the present holder; while, in the following year, a bull of Pope Sixtus IV narrates that the king of Scotland desired its dignity as a priory and the order therein should be suppressed and the priory erected into a collegiate church with a deanery and several canonries and prebends, endowed from the priory's revenues, to be called the Chapel Royal of Coldingham, Patrick Hume to be presented to the newly-erected deanery.⁵ The project did not mature, but it is worth mentioning that it was revived in 1485 (after Hume's death) when Parliament passed an Act annexing the priory to the Chapel Royal of Stirling,⁶ and, after obtaining papal consent,⁷ further declared in 1487 that any attempt to oppose the annexation would be construed as treasonable.⁸ This provision, aimed at the house of Hume, led to their rebellion in concert with the Hepburns which cost James III his life at Sauchieburn in June, 1488.⁹

Although a letter of 18th December, 1474, indicates that Patrick Hume, repenting of his intrusion, was moved to negotiate with the monks with a view to restoring them—"wher of we are right glad"¹⁰—it appears from a record of 14th October, 1478, that negotiations had broken down and Hume was still in possession.¹¹ Coldingham, however, was soon to be delivered from the oppressor for, on 19th March, 1479/80, the arch-

¹ *Coldingham*, CCIH.

² *Ibid.*, CCIV.

³ *Ibid.*, CCX (undated).

⁴ *Ibid.*, CCXIX. Cf. *Benefices*, p. 328.

⁵ *Scottish Benefices*, p. 172; Theiner, *Vet. Mon.*, p. 472 seq.

⁶ *Coldingham*, p. x.

⁷ *Hist. of Chapel Royal*, p. xxiii.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxv; Hume Brown, *History*, I, p. 285.

¹⁰ *Coldingham*, CCXXXIV.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, CCXXXVI.

deaconry of Teviotdale and the parish church of Kyrynton are mentioned as void by the death of Hume "at the Apostolic See."¹

In addition to his other benefices and the office of protonotary apostolic,² Hume held the canonry of Banchory Devenick, for which he paid annates in 1465.³ Characteristically, the one recorded instance of his interest in Carrington is concerned with the parochial revenues. A notarial instrument of 23rd December, 1464, recounts the settlement of a dispute between the abbot and convent of Newbattle and "venerabilem ac magne sciencie⁴ virum magistrum Patricium Hum apostolice sedis prothonotarium ac commendatarium prioratus de Coldingham archidiaconum Tiuidalie et Rectorem ecclesie parochialis de Caryntoun" regarding the allocation of the garbal teinds of certain lands to the churches of Cockpen (which was appropriated to Newbattle) and Carrington.⁵ How the parish of Carrington was served during his tenure of the rectory we have no means of knowing nor, it is certain, would this be a matter of concern to a man of his coarse-grained, acquisitive type.

IV

None of Hume's known successors attained his notoriety. Of William Balze (Baillie), rector of Keringtone, it can only be said that, in 1501, he received a royal grant of £50,⁶ and witnessed, in the same year, the lengthy charter which details the foundation of the Chapel Royal of Stirling.⁷ On 25th February, 1538/9, John Meggot (or Megget) is mentioned as rector,⁸ and also in 1541⁹ and 1543.¹⁰ A little later—1547—these is an inexplicable entry in the Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer :

"Item, to Thomas Lindsay, sone to the persoun (parson) of Caryntoun, quha was lamyt of ane leg at the assege (siege) of Sanctandrois . . ." ¹¹

Priest's sons were not uncommon in this part of the Middle Ages, but of whether Lindsay was the son of a predecessor of Meggot there is no shred of evidence.

¹ *Scottish Benefices*, pp. 195-6.

² Mentioned as such in a quittance of 31 Aug., 1462 (*Benefices*, p. 277), and frequently thereafter.

³ *Benefices*, pp. 152, 244, 282.

⁴ On this phrase Chalmers in *Caledonia* bases his statement that Hume was "learned in science."

⁵ *Neubottle*, 291.

⁶ *Exch. Rolls*, XI, p. 358.

⁸ *RSS.*, II, 2895.

¹⁰ *RSS.*, III, 573.

⁷ *Reg. Cap. Reg. Striv.*, 1.

⁹ *Laing Charters*, 457.

¹¹ *LTA.*, IX, p. 126.

We have seen the two forms of exploitation—by regulars and by pluralists—which characterise the history of this parish. Now, within sight of the Reformation, a third form of exploitation appears, viz., by a layman. Meggot had died or at least demitted office before 25th January, 1547/8, when two presentations to the vacant rectory were made under the Privy Seal—one to Master John Sinclare,¹ who did not obtain possession; and another to James Hamilton, son of Gavin Hamilton of Orbistoun,² and later designated as “of Ruchbank,” who was still holding it as “rector and vicar” in 1578,³ well after the Reformation had come to pass. Hamilton had previously been the recipient of “pickings” which fell to him by royal favour—he was awarded the gift of escheats of traitors in Glasgow on 26th May, 1544;⁴ and it was a symptom of the low estate into which the Church had sunk that the rectory of Carrington, i.e., its income not its duties, came into the hands of one who could make no claim to be called “clericus.” The holding of benefices by laymen was one of the evils which the Provincial Council of 1558-9 made a belated attempt to remedy. But the statute which enacted that—

“all . . . who hold benefices shall . . . be cited by their local ordinaries; and those who have not at least been admitted to minor orders shall (be compelled to) take the orders required by the livings they hold or they shall resign their said livings”⁵

remained a dead letter.

Meanwhile, the parochial cure was served by a vicar, whose status was doubtless that of vicar-pensioner, analogous to that of the parochial chaplain of earlier days. The wheel had revolved full circle, and the church of Carrington which, when it is first on record, was served by the hireling of a monastery had, as its priest, at the end of its medieval career, another hireling—of a lay rector. On 5th June, 1549, Nicol Ramsay, liferenter of Dalhousie, in the church of Kerrington, demanded a debt due to him by Dionesius Elphinston and Margaret Maxwell. The same day, Nicol consigned this money into the hands of the vicar, James Hopkirk, who promised to keep it for him, but protested that he should not be able to warrantance of this sum of 200 merks

“if it happened that this was taken from him by Englishmen, thieves, robbers or other such evil-minded men.”⁶

The latter aspersion is explained by the fact that it was the time of the invasion of Scotland by Somerset. The chief interest of this record is, however, that it enables us to show that the vicar of Carrington in 1549

¹ RSS., III, 2603.

² *Ibid.*, 2607.

³ RMS., IV, 2816.

⁴ RSS., III, 785.

⁵ *Statutes*, p. 169.

⁶ *Prot. Book of Sir Thos. Steven*, quoted PSA., II, p. 410. Cf. *Statutes*, pp. ciii-civ.

became a convert to the Reformed doctrine, for James Hopkirk reappears as Protestant "reader" at Carrington in 1574.¹

V

Having surveyed the scanty and unequal data which are available regarding the cure of souls of a country parish, we may return to the question asked at the outset of this paper: How efficiently or inefficiently was it done? The answer must be that inefficiency was to a large extent inevitable. The system of appropriations, which lowered the status and emolument of parochial clergy, was apt to have as its result that men of small learning, capable of the merest hackwork and willing to be hired for meagre pay were entrusted with the charge of parishes. But when a parish passed into the hands of a secular rector, who, availing himself of dispensations, held a plurality of benefices, the situation was, if anything, worse. Professor Hamilton Thompson, writing of the English parish church in the Middle Ages, has said:

"To the medieval mind the habit of a non-resident rector, holding several churches in plurality, was a matter of course which cannot be judged by the moral standards of our day. It must be regarded simply as a fact not as an abuse."²

The same authority, however, goes on to make the damaging admission:

"It is clear that where a man held ten or twelve churches at once they might be served very irregularly."³

We are fain to make the statement apply to Scotland by reducing "ten or twelve" to "three or four" and by adding "or not at all." At the hands of a man whose interest was centred not in his duties, but entirely in its revenues, a parish stood to suffer not merely from inefficiency, but from neglect.

Much of this state of inefficiency—to put it no lower—was due to inadequate episcopal and archidiaconal supervision. Visitation records in Scotland are extremely few; and the reason may be, apart from carelessness in the keeping of registers and the disappearance of such records as were kept, that visitation was apt to be perfunctory, and concerned mainly with the receipt of procurations and other dues, or done by deputy or omitted altogether. But it is fair to state that the most conscientious diocesan had to contend with regulars who could evade his authority and seculars over whose appointment and conduct he had no effective

¹ *Wodrow Misc.*, I, p. 369. In 1541, he appears as a notary (*Laing Chs.*, 457).

² *Historical Growth of the English Parish Church*, p. 18.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

control, since they held their benefices by papal provision and were, as a matter of course, non-resident. Although conciliar decrees to mitigate, if not to remedy, the exploitation of the parishes were made from time to time, the evil remained ; and when, in the last days of the medieval Church, after a long spell of conciliar inaction, steps were taken by the episcopate to deal with it, the time had long passed for such action to prevail.

The medieval Church in Scotland is apt to appear to us as a "Churchman's Church," an institution characterised by stress on the privileges of the clergy rather than by responsibility for the spiritual wellbeing of the laity.¹ It is not strictly relevant, but it is almost necessary to note that the parishioners of Carrington figure hardly at all in its annals during the Middle Ages as compared with the conspicuous, even exuberant part they play, e.g., in the Covenanting period. Too much stress, however, must not be placed on what is merely absent from records. In many medieval parishes it can be shown, especially from the evidence supplied by protocol books bearing on the later Middle Ages, that the parishioners were actively—and not merely passively—concerned in ecclesiastical affairs, e.g., in the election of the parish clerk, in which both men and women had a vote ; and the foundation of chantries, which showed, *inter alia*, the determination of the founders to secure the services of a priest by furnishing an endowment for his maintenance ;² and it is a commonplace of medieval history that the church, however low might be the level of its spiritual life, was the centre of the little parochial world and influenced its customs and its outlook so profoundly that these bore the impress of the Middle Ages long after that period had passed. It is easy to say hard things about the medieval Scottish Church, and there is no field where its weaknesses more plainly appear than its country parishes. Considering the inefficiency of its functioning and the neglect rather than the cure of souls which it so often suggests, we may wonder how that Church survived so long and why religion itself did not utterly lose its vitality and sink into irretrievable decay. That Christianity in Scotland maintained its place in the national life was scarcely due to its outstanding and official representatives in the Middle Ages ; we may rather attribute its continuance, despite the failings of the Church as an institution and the exploitation of the parishes which went on unremedied, to the latent, largely unrecorded attachment of the common man to religion.

¹ This is the common charge of satirists against them, e.g.,

"Swa thai the Kirk have in thair cure

Thay fors bot litill how it fure,

Nor of the buikis or bellis quha rang thame :

Thai pans (think) nocht of the p(a)rochin pure (poor),

Hed thai the pelfe to pairt amang thame."

(Dunbar, *To the King*.)

² There is no record of the election of a parish clerk or of the foundation of a chantry at Carrington.

